Student-Generated Videos: Bringing ESP and General English Course Content to Life

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The goal of language learning for most students is to be able to communicate in the target language. In English for specific purposes (ESP) contexts, students want to learn the content that they will encounter outside the classroom—that is, the appropriate grammar, register, and discourse as used in the target situation (Hutchinson and Waters 1987; Bouzidi 2009). Thus, at the end of the course, teachers expect learners to put the ESP lessons from class into practice in real life. How can this be done and assessed, especially in large classes, as in the case of many developing countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)?

In the traditional way of assessment with a pencil and paper, students take exams during and at the end of the course to check their understanding of the materials. Or they may be assigned to recite group conversations with different roles—such as a doctor and nurse or a customer and salesperson—based on the course materials. However, none of the above gives a clear picture of how students should use the materials in specific, meaningful situations that mimic authentic use of language in the target context.

One solution can be found in the learners themselves, through integrated projects. In this article, I describe a practical technique in which students implement ESP course materials in meaningful real-life contexts by recording videos of themselves in specific settings. In my experience, this student-generated video (SGV) project proved to be an accurate display of students' proficiency, a strategy to improve communicative competence, a challenging and enjoyable task for students, and an effective assessment tool—even for large classes.

Ideally, the activity allows ESP students to practice lesson content outside the classroom walls. Students gather in groups of four to six and choose unit materials to dramatize. As I explain below, they go through steps, from choosing the course materials they want to focus on to developing a scenario to videotaping the scene. In an ESP course for nursing students that I taught, the videos related to unit lessons such as welcoming patients, consulting patients, and recording patients' complaints. In each group, participants acted out various roles, primarily of nurses, doctors, and patients. To illustrate the steps of the activity, I describe a case study using the context of first-year students at a nursing-training college in DRC.

BENEFITS OF SGVs

By implementing SGVs, as a communicative-competence strategy and an assessment technique, I have identified many advantages:

1. *It raises students' motivation and engagement*. SGVs give students a sense of achievement and competence in the target language because they can use it in meaningful situations—i.e., in authentic interactions such as those between patient and doctor. Moreover, students are excited to implement what they have learned in "real" circumstances.

Students discover and use learning strategies, such as breaking up complex utterances into manageable chunks that are easy to learn, remember, and put into practice.

2. *That motivation is further increased in group activities*. Together, learners decide on the format of their SGVs and share ideas. Thus, each one of them has an opportunity to take on the role of a leader who can influence decisions made collectively by the group.

3. *Students use the skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in nearly all the phases of SGV production*. Before recording the video, they discuss and listen to each other and then write up scripts, which are sample dialogs and conversations serving as models from which each participant comes up with their own utterances. While preparing and recording, students practice all the skills as if they were in an authentic setting.

4. *It empowers students' decision-making, problem solving, and creativity*. Learners brainstorm scenes, then choose one to use. They also solve problems ranging from communicative-competence barriers to pragmatic competence regarding the appropriate use of language in the scene.

5. *It makes students aware of learning strategies*. Throughout the process of SGV production, students discover and use learning strategies, such as breaking up complex utterances into manageable chunks that are easy to learn, remember, and put into practice. This awareness improves their learning (Harmer 2007; Tomak 2022; Atmowardoyo, Weda, and Sakkir 2021).

6. *It enlivens the ESP content by using the kind of authentic materials learners are likely to encounter in their specific fields*. Thus, it answers the basic questions of *what*, *where*, *why*, and *how* in course and material planning.

7. *It helps develop accuracy and fluency*. Through rehearsals, learners practice the correct way of saying something and how to say it smoothly, confidently, and naturally.

8. *It is student-centered*. Here, students are in control of their own learning: they choose their own scenes, what to focus on, and even how to practice.

9. *It helps teachers assess students in large classes with limited resources*. In DRC, many tertiary class sizes reach up to 200 or more. How is it possible to assess all students and to give each of them a meaningful opportunity to practice using what they have been studying in the course? SGVs, which require only a smartphone, internet access, and (for example) a WhatsApp account, allow for formative and summative assessments even in large classes. The project encompasses many features for evaluation because not only do students have a chance to practice authentic communicative interactions, but also each student is encouraged to make up or add their own ideas while developing and recording scenes. This seems a realistic display of students' progress because it showcases the true level of learners.

10. *SGVs are task-based, which helps students develop language skills while performing a real-life activity*. Tasks can be an effective opportunity to troubleshoot students' difficulties, and in this case, students often become autonomous troubleshooters.

THE PROCEDURE

SGVs can be implemented in any English classroom in general and in ESP in particular. There is no class-size limit. Learners' level is not a barrier either; many Congolese tertiary students are essentially true beginners. Another point to consider is the grouping format, to ensure that every student in the class takes part. For example, in a classroom of 200 learners, the teacher can opt for five participants per group, which would make 40 groups. It's important to note, though, that the teacher has to make sure each group has a reliable internet connection and an account on an accessible social-media platform, such as WhatsApp, to send their completed video. Luckily, nowadays, most learners have access to those tools.

The following steps for implementing SGVs are conducted with the help of the teacher, but under the control of the learners, who decide on every aspect of their video production.

Step 1: Teachers explain the task and create groups. Tell the students that they are going to put into practice what they have studied in the course in an authentic context: they will create a scene, write a script, and produce a video. They will work in groups, and each group can choose the unit they want to base their video on. (For teachers, the important thing is to help learners select unit contents they find suitable to their level. For instance, most beginners would choose materials that can be practiced as question-and-answer interactions and that mimic the target situation of the units.)

Next, determine the number of participants per group. Obviously, the smaller the group, the more opportunities students have to practice. Also, determine the timeline; make sure to allocate enough time for students to prepare, practice, and perform. I have found that a maximum of ten days is sufficient.

Teachers can adapt details such as group size, target content, and timeline to match their own contexts.

Step 2: Students choose course materials. Students go through the course syllabus and select features to practice in a "real" context. Those features can range from a question-and-answer dialog (which was easy to adopt for most learners in my context), a debate or discussion about a course topic, explanations (such as describing treatment options to a patient), to other features that the learners feel will suit their real-life needs.

With question-and-answer dialogs, students choose a scenario that can involve all group members—it might be a conversation between five people who take on the roles of a patient, a family member of the patient, two nurses, and a doctor. Debates or discussions that suit the real-life needs of students' future work could occur during morning staff meetings in hospitals. Two members might play the roles of nurses presenting a case, while two other students play the roles of nurses who listen, take notes, and ask relevant questions such as, "Is the patient diabetic?"; another student can play the role of a doctor who should propose the kind of treatment needed, according to the information presented.

Step 3: Students make a script. Students write up a dialog or conversation that includes elements from the course that they would like to focus on. Each participant contributes ideas and opinions to mimic an authentic situation. Here, the teacher is available to answer questions, provide guidance as needed, and ensure that all students are involved in the process and using English while discussing their ideas.

It should be noted that students should try not to simply recite the lines written in the script. Rather, the scripts should serve as model utterances from which students will choose a way to communicate their ideas.

Step 4: Groups visualize various scenes. While writing up a dialog, students simultaneously think about various locations to match the conversation. They do this by looking for real-life contexts in which

they can practice the dialog. This can be, for example, in a hospital reception area where receptionists register new patients. Again, here, each group member shares ideas, and they all dive into a recurrent problem-solving and creativity process. The teacher can assist them when needed, but students remain at the center.

Step 5: Students choose a scenario. Learners agree on a single scenario that fits the desires of all the participants in the group and matches the written dialog. The scenario should be realistic in that it has to display a real-life application of the course contents. In case of disagreements among students, they can decide on a scenario by voting.

Step 6: Students assign responsibilities. Learners decide on the roles each one will assume. They choose roles in which they feel comfortable and that fit with their abilities and interests. Moreover, every participant contributes their own creativity and paralinguistic features (gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions) to authenticate the scenario in their role and with their own way of speaking. Here, the teacher can help groups to pick roles, if necessary.

Step 7: Groups select a location and practice. Ideally, groups will select a spot that mimics the real-life application of the scenario. For instance, nursing students may ask for special permission at local hospitals or health centers to perform the scene. This is intrinsically motivating, as learners are engaged in an authentic communicative context of the course, which makes them enjoy the activity and understand the language better. Learners then get together to practice the script with their respective roles. They do it several times until they are comfortable. They can consult the teacher if they need help with certain words or pronunciation.

Of course, it can be difficult or even impossible to perform in hospitals or health centers. Groups may have to set up their own stages that can be identified as such places. This was the case with some groups in my class when permission was denied because of hospital policies. Nevertheless, with the help of a few basic props, they were able to create their own "health center," and their performance was as effective as those done in real places.

Step 8: Students videotape the scene. When groups are ready to record, they should find someone outside of their group to videotape the scene. As with any video production, students should record several times and choose the version they agree is best. The video length depends on the group, but in large classes, the teacher may have to limit the duration to no more than five minutes; students with more-basic skills can produce shorter videos. Teachers have an idea of their students' ability and should keep expectations realistic; the videos should be long enough to give students a chance to practice effectively, but—especially with large classes—teachers must be mindful of the amount of time required to watch the finished videos.

Step 9: Students watch and reflect on the video. After group members select one video that they feel is the best in terms of performance, they view it again and take notes about what went well, mistaken sentences or utterances, and the overall performance, and then decide whether to share the video or redo it. This step makes learners aware of their own language use, gestures, facial expressions, and so on. Remember that students should be looking for strengths and things they like as well as things they might want to keep working on.

Step 10: Groups submit and/or share their videos. Groups send their finalized video to the teacher using social media such as WhatsApp. The video can also be copied to a flash drive and given to the teacher. In addition, each member can keep a copy of the video. The videos can also be shared with other students in the class—however, before groups share, make sure that all members of the group agree that they are comfortable with sharing the video. Teachers must

emphasize that the videos are not to be shared unless all group members give permission to do so.

CASE STUDY

This brief case study illustrates the implementation of the steps described above in a class of first-year students at a nursing-training college. It was a 60-hour English course in a class of 366 students. Their knowledge of English was rudimentary, and most of the students spoke three or more languages: French (the language of instruction in both secondary school and higher education) and two or three local languages (such as Lingala and Kikongo).

The course content was designed to match the real-life interactional contexts that nurses might find themselves in (typically a clinical setting, with interactions among nurses, patients and their family members, and doctors).

Near the end of the course, I assigned the task to learners in accordance with the steps mentioned above.

Step 1. I explained the task, and students had ten days to complete it. In my class, students formed their own groups of five members and arranged their own meeting sessions. In some cases, groups had slightly more or fewer members; that was not a problem.

Step 2. Group members went through the course syllabus and selected notions/units that they were interested in and agreed to focus on. Most groups opted for a question-and-answer format for their dialogs.

Step 3. Groups reviewed the selected content and collaborated to write scripts. Scripts had to reflect real-life situations of nursing, such as introducing yourself to other nurses and hospital personnel, asking for medical equipment, welcoming new patients and filling in patient record forms, asking for vital signs and symptoms, and diagnosing and monitoring patients. Here, some groups needed help with wording, sentence building, and intonation.

Different groups produced different script ideas. Groups set up interactions between a nurse and patient talking about health problems (*How are you feeling? … I have a headache and sore eyes*.), between nurses in a staff meeting discussing the health progress of one or two patients (*[Nurse] Sarah, please tell us about the patient in Bed 4B*.), and between a doctor, a nurse, and a patient discussing health advice (*Don't drink soda*.).

Steps 4, 5, and 6. Groups practiced the script in different locations. Some groups practiced in the classroom, and others did it at home.

At first, when members practiced, they changed roles so that they could experience different aspects of the situation (e.g., each member could practice as a patient, then change roles and practice as a nurse). Then members decided on the roles in which they were most comfortable. Note that changing roles can be extremely helpful for students, as they not only get to practice different parts, but they also have a chance to experience the situation from different points of view.

Step 7. Many groups asked permission from local hospitals and health centers to practice. Although not all were granted permission, this added a real-life element to the activity and intrinsically motivated students to enjoy it. Groups had several hours to rehearse.

Step 8. When groups felt ready and confident in their roles, they recorded the scene.

Step 9. Group members gathered to watch the video and reflect on their language use and their performance. Here, students had a chance to redo the production in order to improve it.

Step 10. Finally, when groups were satisfied with the video they produced, they sent it to me through WhatsApp. The groups that could not send their video because of internet issues gave it to me on a flash drive.

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Throughout the process, learners benefit from the language skills of speaking, listening, reading, and writing; conversational strategies; knowledge of functional language; and group work. In addition, those steps help reluctant students, as they have enough time for preparation, repetition and rehearsal, and participation throughout the task (Harmer 2007).

CONCLUSION

SGVs can be used for both formative and summative assessments. Moreover, the activity taps into students' interests (learning real-life content), preferences (learning in collaboration), and levels of understanding (making up their own dialogs). Here, within the context of the course, students personalize language, and they learn in groups. Moreover, they gain skills in communication, critical thinking, creativity, and reflection, which are paramount in everyday life. Teachers can use SGVs to teach language and life skills simultaneously.

The steps suggested in this article for implementing SGVs can be used in nearly any teaching setting and can be adapted, if necessary. Throughout the process, the teacher provides guidance and facilitates, but students have control of the actual work and make decisions about their own video production.

As mentioned, SGVs can also be used in English language courses other than ESP subjects. With a general English course that extends throughout the year, students can be assigned to produce videos at the end of each thematic unit. They can do it either as regular homework or as a class project. For instance, after studying lessons on identifying objects (with questions such as *What's this?* and *What are these?*), students can make a video talking about furniture in their house, objects in a store, or items they find in a public place.

In addition, SGVs can be used with all types of learners. With young learners, the teacher can take up the roles of facilitator and cameraperson, or students can learn how to film their classmates' conversations. Such videos can be sent to the parents as a way to share the work of their little heroes.

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